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ABSTRACT

Student behavior problems have been found to be the most significant and frequently addressed concern of rural educators. A model was developed in response to the needs of rural educators in West Virginia for planning, documenting, implementing, and monitoring behavior plans for students with emotional and behavior problems. The first step involves forming a team of teachers who closely interact with the student, support personnel, and parents. The team interviews the teacher who has the most contact with the student and compiles lists of problematic behaviors and desirable replacement behaviors. The team then ranks behaviors according to probability of occurrence and importance. Interventions include positive reinforcement strategies, punishment, and proactive/preventive strategies. Positive reinforcer strategies such as contracts and point cards are used with students who inconsistently exhibit the desirable replacement behavior. Punishment may be used if the focus on the desirable behavior is not sufficient to deter the performance of the undesirable behavior. Most important are proactive/preventive strategies that include environmental or structural modifications that inhibit the problem behavior, and strategies such as social skills training that teach the desirable behavior. Within each category, team members determine several intervention options and begin with the least intrusive intervention feasible. Data collection and monitoring continue throughout the intervention phase. As the student meets success and positive behavior maintenance is established, the team fades the intervention and replaces it with a less intrusive option. All phases of the process provide documentation of the behavior plan and its effectiveness. If the student is receiving special education services, behavior objectives appear on the individual education plan. (LP)

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PLANNING FOR CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS: A METHOD TO THE MADNESS

The Madness

Rural educators often experience frustration and feelings of inadequacy when attempting to provide services for students with challenging behaviors. Their frustrations are often compounded by the critical shortages of personnel serving as behavioral specialists and the limited access rural areas have to highly specialized services. Limited access to qualified technical assistance is a common complaint of educators attempting to provide services for students with challenging behaviors (Knitzer, Steinberg, & Fleisch,1990). Neither regular education nor special education has adequately addressed these frustrations. Although students identified under the emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) label should receive specialized services addressing their behavioral challenges, Grosenick and Huntze (1980) found that approximately three-fourths of the school-age EBD population were not provided with special education services.

The only "service" many students experiencing behavioral challenges receive is "exposure" to the school discipline system. Data from a recent survey by Sugai and Chard (1994) indicate that most schools' discipline systems are reactive in nature. Few discipline systems are designed to teach social skills or desirable replacement behaviors. Their focus is not on proactive interventions which prevent behavior problems. These discipline systems do not address maintenance or generalization of positive behavior. Most school discipline systems merely focus on punishing students who violate classroom and school rules.

Lewis, Chard and Scott (1994) argue for a "schoolwide concerted group effort" to improve children's behaviors and to reintegrate students with EBD back into general education placements. Practical models which utilize a team approach to develop, implement, and monitor individual behavior change plans have been successful in reintegrating students in the mainstream and proactively dealing with all students who present challenging behaviors (Colvin, Kameenui & Sugai, 1994). Collaborative

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efforts between/among special educators, general educators and parents in the planning stages ensures ownership of the behavior change plan and joint responsibility for identifying and implementing behavioral intervention strategies that are both effective and feasible. These collaborative efforts would facilitate generalization and maintenance of appropriate behaviors.

The Method

A study by Savage, Wienke, & Miller (1994) found behavior problems to be the most significant and frequently addressed problem by rural general educators with consulting teachers. The following steps and procedures for planning, documenting, implementing and monitoring behavior plans for students with challenging behaviors is a direct response to this study and the needs of rural West Virginia special and general educators. The guidesheets and suggested formats used in this presentation have been field tested with novice behavior planning teams.

Teams

Teams should consist of teachers who interact with the student experiencing behavior challenges as well as selected teachers who will work as support personnel or who can provide objective feedback to the team. Parents are also members of this team in order to secure family support and opportunities for generalization from school to home.

Team Interview

The team must first conduct an interview session with the teacher(s) having the most contact with the student. The teacher should explain the student's problematic behavior and note all circumstances surrounding the behavioral performance. The team poses questions to assist the interviewee (teacher) in operationalizing the student's behavior. It is very common for the initial comments offered by the interviewee to be somewhat vague or abstract. The team's support and questioning work to yield a concrete observable measurable problem behavior. The incompatible desirable replacement behavior should also be identified through team questioning after each and every problem behavior is noted. This will ensure that the team produces not only a list of problematic behaviors but a list of desirable replacement behaviors which can serve as a guide to alert parents ,students and teachers of the behavioral expectations at school.

Prioritizing Behaviors

The interview process is likely to yield a lengthy list of problem behaviors. It is not uncommon for teams to mistakenly focus energies on insignificant behavior while ignoring other problems that require immediate attention. Therefore, it is imperative that the team assess the behavior list and prioritize the identified behavior according to actual occurrence of behavior and impact or importance of the behavior to avoid "barking up the wrong tree".

If there is no data verifying the frequency of the behavior occurrence, the team should declare a data collection period. The listed problematic behaviors can be explored according to duration or frequency depending on the dimensions of the behavior. A team member can serve as the observer and collect this data or the teacher may be able to continue interacting with the student and collect this information for the next team meeting.

The team must also collect data on the desirable replacement behavior. This data may be used to assist the team in determining if the student has the replacement behavior in his/her behavioral repertoire and/or provide evidence that these desirable behaviors are not occurring at an acceptable rate. If the desirable behavior is occurring frequently and the problem behavior still exists the team may recognize the need to establish an alternate replacement behavior match for the problem behavior.

Once data is collected the team can use this data to rank behaviors according to probability of occurrence and importance. Problem behaviors exhibiting a medium to high probability of occurrence and ranked as medium to high on the importance scale are targeted as priority behaviors. These behaviors and their desirable incompatible matches (replacement behaviors) become the focus of the student's behavior plan and the team's energy for planning interventions.

Categorizing Behavioral Strategies

Interventions are then considered within the following three categories: (1) positive reinforcer strategies; (2) punishers; (3) proactive/preventive strategies. Positive reinforcer strategies such as contracts and pointcards can be used with students who currently have the desirable replacement behaviors in their repertoires but exhibit such desirable behavior inconsistently. Punishers may be used if the mere focus on the desirable incompatible behavior is not sufficient to deter the performance

of the undesirable behavior and this behavior can not be ignored. Perhaps the most important category of behavioral interventions is proactive/preventive strategies. This category consists of environmental or structural modifications that would inhibit the problem behavior and strategies which teach the desirable behavior such as social skill training. These strategies are imperative for students who do not exhibit any evidence of the replacement behavior in their behavioral performances.

Teams must determine strategies within all three categories of behavioral interventions. Within each category the team should determine 2-3 interventions options. Within and across all three categories the team must establish a hierarchy of intrusiveness. The team should select the least intrusive intervention feasible and avoid using intrusive interventions unless warranted. This hierarchy and listing of intervention options should be followed in a predetermined sequence which meets with the team's approval.

Data collection probes and monitoring should continue throughout the intervention phase. As the student meets success and maintenance is established, the team needs to fade the intervention and replace it with a lesser intrusive option from the hierarchy listing of behavioral strategies. If the strategy is ineffective the team may decide to move towards a more intrusive intervention and provide monitoring data of the ineffective less intrusive strategy as evidence to progress to more intrusive interventions.

Writing the Plan

All phases of this process should be written up and serve as documentation of the plan and it's effectiveness. The target behaviors identified in the interview process will serve as the behavioral stems of the behavior objectives. If the student is receiving special education service these objectives should appear on the I.E.P. and the document may serve as an addendum to the I.E.P. The hierarchy of interventions and the sequence in which they will be used should also be documented. Plans to fade towards lesser intrusive strategies must also be addressed. The team should document the method which will be used to monitor the plan's effectiveness. (Teams may decide to use the original data collection method as a probe throughout the intervention phase). Since the team is made up of various members who interact with the student across

different circumstances and settings modification of the plan across settings can also be addressed thus providing the plan with a generalization component. (Suggested format examples and guidesheets will be provided during the presentation).

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